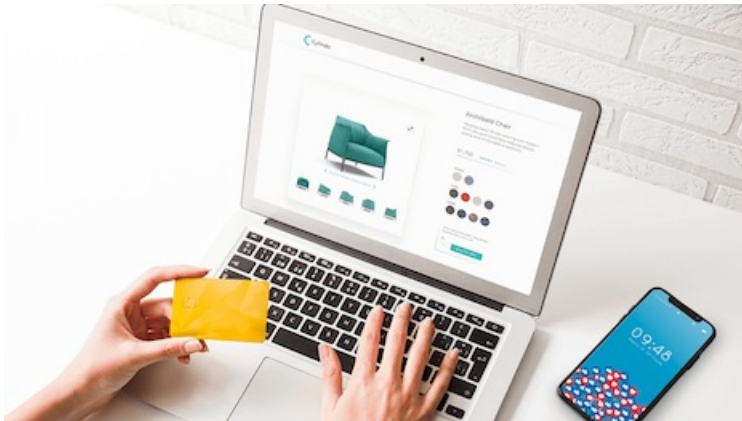


RETAIL

How luxury brands can use visualization for immersive ecommerce experiences

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Companies such as Cylindo are working with luxury companies on 3D visualization. Image credit: Cylindo

By SARAH JONES

As more luxury shopping migrates online, retailers are finding ways to recreate the in-store experience in digital, allowing consumers to make more confident purchases.

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From 3D imagery to augmented and virtual reality, the ecommerce experience is branching out from flat product pages. When trying to sell premium-priced products to consumers sight unseen, visualization can be the difference between making or breaking a sale.

"Quality imagery and visual experiences are critical for all digital commerce, but especially true for luxury brands and retailers," said Scott Anderson, senior consultant at [FitForCommerce](#), Short Hills, NJ. "Shoppers want to feel and touch items, particularly those with a higher price tag, which naturally is a challenge in ecommerce.

"Visualization technologies can help them get closer to delivering experiences that are more tangible," he said. "At the very basic level, luxury retailers cannot skimp on their visual asset investments, including video and 3D imaging.

"They need to showcase the product in the best way possible from all angles, details and context. Editorial video can help make product experiences more tangible and realistic, and there are plenty technologies that can easily turn editorial videos into shoppable experiences, too."

Seeing clearly

One technology that luxury brands have adopted is 3D imaging. Rather than singular photos, this allows a shopper to view a model of a product in 360 degrees.

For example, department store Tsum worked with Cappasity to allow shoppers to view fashions in 3D. With the technology, consumers can rotate and flip the products, getting an up-close and more accurate view of what the product actually looks like than a static 2D image could convey ([see story](#)).

Cappasity turns a video of a product into a still that can be viewed from multiple angles.

Cappasity's process

Ligne Roset similarly worked with Cyllindo to enable consumers to view its furniture more thoroughly during the research phase. Before making a furniture purchase, consumers engage with a retailer's store and online flagship an average of seven times.

Through a configurator, Ligne Roset shoppers can see all textile and customization options in 3D. Cyllindo, which works with other home brands, has noted an average uptick in conversion of 25 percent and lowered return rates when its visualizer is added to the ecommerce experience ([see story](#)).

"In 2019 earning attention is not enough," said Aleksandar Atanasov, marketing manager at [Cyllindo](#), Skopje, Macedonia. "We live in the experience economy."

"In a recent survey conducted by Brand keys, 95 percent of CMOs said 'establishing trust between my brand and the consumer' was a top issue that keeps them up at night," he said. "Customer experience and trust are inexplicably linked. Fixing that trust deficit across the complete buyer journey is a daunting task."

"Immersive technologies like 3D product visualization, augmented reality and virtual reality can play a key role in reshaping customer experiences by increasing buyers' confidence. This is especially important when buying a big-ticket item."

"In luxury retail, experiences are increasingly digitally driven. For instance, 360-views become a minimum requirement online. Allowing shoppers to view products from different angles can significantly boost trust by giving them a sense of control."

Another element that is changing the ecommerce experience is virtual stores. Instead of having to choose between bricks-and-mortar and online, brands have merged the two in digital environments that mimic the feel of a flagship store.

Oscar de la Renta is the latest to team up with Next Retail Concepts to bring its New York boutique to a global audience. Through an interface, shoppers can click and drag to digitally walk around the store, enabling them to discover fashions as they are merchandised in the physical boutique.



Oscar de la Renta's virtual store

Customers can also shop the virtual store by clicking on products. This brings up more information as well as the opportunity to select options and buy.

"The future of ecommerce is immersive," said Ben Houston, chief technology officer of [ThreeKit](#), Ottawa, Canada. "A static image is no longer enough."

"Instead, customers want to experience luxury products in context of their own world, whether it's their own body, their kitchen, or their yard," he said. "When they can, customers buy more and return less."

"Luxury retailers offering their products in 3D and AR mostly do so for their ecommerce or Web sites. However, there is also a growing number who leverage these new technologies to virtually expand their store offering. They can now show their customers seductive representations of all variations of their products without having them all in stock in every store."

Brands are also creating a more 3D experience via screens through augmented and virtual reality.

One of the categories that has adopted this technology is home furnishings and dcor.

Swarovski teamed with Mastercard to allow shoppers to view products in a virtual home. Meanwhile, Gucci, Artsy

and Artemest are among the companies allowing consumers to see products in their actual rooms via AR, letting them preview how a particular work of art or dcor piece will look before they buy.

"Some brands leverage AR to provide experiences that allow shoppers to virtually try on products or place items in a home setting, etc., however, some of these experiences come off as either gimmicky or are still not mature enough to deliver the authenticity required in luxury," FitForCommerce's Mr. Anderson said.

"Luxury retailers need to be cautious when creating AR or VR experiences," he said. "If done right, they can be powerful brand experiences, but the quality and experience really needs to be on brand, or it can do more harm than good."

Ecommerce expansion

As the luxury goods business pivots to incorporate digital into many brands' strategies, ecommerce is proving to be a significant growth driver.

In the second quarter of 2018, increases in online sales of luxury goods outpaced the overall luxury growth, according to research from First Data. Jewelry, women's accessories and specialty apparel were the biggest contributors to overall luxury growth throughout the quarter, with the categories combined accounting for 61 percent of luxury goods ([see story](#)).

As innovations such as augmented reality and voice assistants become more mainstream, consumers are expected to move even more of their shopping online.

The majority of consumers who have shopped online using augmented reality would be willing to give up the apparel in-store buying experience entirely, according to a report from Antaxi. While the luxury buying process is largely still driven by physical stores, technology could make more consumers willing to forego the bricks-and-mortar experience in the coming years ([see story](#)).

"The connected customer moves across channels to research, purchase and review products, more informed than ever before," Cylindo's Mr. Atanasov said. "There's no linear path to purchase.

"However in today's omnichannel world, one common denominator is that for more than half of customers their purchase journey starts online," he said. "This demonstrates the importance of having sound ecommerce visualization and digital merchandising strategy in place.

"Don't forget the basics. Your Web site should feel expensive and exclusive, but also be easy to use, fast and offer a seamless experience across devices. Be clear in your message and concise in your promise and communication."